

Multiculturalism and Problems of Canadian Unity

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And at the centre of this menagerie stands another human being: the shaman, the chief, whose title in Haida is Kilstlaai..... The canoe contains both Raven and Eagle, women and men, a rich man and a poorer man, and animals as well as human beings. Is it fair, then, to see in it an image not only of one culture but of the entire family of living things? Not all is peace and contentment in this crowded boat. There are nervous faces and tempers running high. But whatever their differences, they are paddling together, in one boat, headed in one direction. Wherever their journey takes them, let us wish them luck.¹

Terrorists have capitalized on liberal Canadian immigration and asylum policies to enjoy safe haven, raise funds, arrange logistical support and plan terrorist attacks.²

Multiculturalism was used as a political slogan in Canada more in the 1990s than in the past decade. Unlike European countries, however, its apparent decline cannot be attributed exclusively to a distrust of non-Europeans, and especially Arab Muslims in the wake of terrorist activity. Rather, the slogan has been partially diffused under the broader postmaterialist concept of diversity, as political debates concerning identity have shifted largely to the rights of gays and lesbians and the rights of religious groups to carve out space in the liberal polity. Since 9/11, “multiculturalism” has also gotten diffused under numerous pronouncements that Canada, unlike the United States, is a “world citizen” whose post-nationalist nationalism makes it a supposedly morally superior nation than its southern neighbor, which remains in the quagmire of Enlightenment beliefs of nationhood. Even so, multiculturalism functions in Canada as a kind of romantic cosmopolitanism aspiration implicit in these other debates, and a close analysis of the

¹ “The Spirit of Haida Gwaii by Bill Reid,” Document of Embassy of Canada in Washington, DC (<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/can-am/washington/services/haida-en.asp>). Retrieved September 27, 2006.

² United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism* (2005), p. 160 (<http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/65473.pdf>). Retrieved September 27, 2006.

politics of multiculturalism illuminates a fundamental insight into the character of the Canadian polity.

An example of such insight can be seen in a letter to a newspaper written about *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, a book written in the 1990s (2nd edition published in 2002) by Trinidad-born Neil Bissoondath, which is critical of Canada's commitment to multiculturalism. The letter-writer counters Bissoondath's criticism by praising the government's policy of multiculturalism for explaining his heritage for him. Bissoondath summarizes the letter: "He explained that before multiculturalism, he had had no sense of self, no sense of what he was and where he came from; he had known nothing of his cultural background, and had never been taught his ancestral language."³ Bissoondath observes that the letter-writer's praise of multiculturalism reveals everything that is wrong with it. For instance, he wonders about the letter-writer's upbringing: where were his parents in teaching him about his background? Why does he need to rely on the state to give him a sense of self-worth? Bissoondath concludes by stating that "so many of us seem to depend on the state for the sense of self that comes from official recognition of our cultural background. Is this not a kind of psychic surrender?"⁴ Multiculturalism, as an expression of political romanticism, is a form of psychic surrender. As an expression of political rule or "regime," it is a form of idealism as well as manipulation.

Multiculturalism aggravates problems inherent in Canadian political life. It was introduced as official policy in the early 1970s as an attempt to create a sense of pan-Canadian nationhood that would absorb Québécois nationalist sentiment. It shifted the

³ Neil Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, (Toronto: Penguin, 2002), 224.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

emphasis in Canadian political life from one of protracted struggles between Québec and the rest of Canada, to one characterized by the search for identity, both pan-Canadian identity and the identity of particular cultures. Yet, the pan-Canadian identity was to be a post-nationalist nationalism, and therefore disconnected not only to culture or ethnicity, but also to common history or experience. It reflects a shift in political life from one centered on the negotiation of interests to the recognition of identities, which, as argued below, is apolitical.

This paper then examines the confusion that multiculturalism has wrought in Canadian political life by considering 1) multiculturalism as a national symbol within the context of the postmaterialist shift from the politics of interests to the politics of identity; 2) multiculturalism as a symbol of the cosmopolitan ideal to redeem historic injustices toward the marginalized; 3) multicultural diversity as cosmopolitan monism; and 4) a concluding consideration to think more constructively about multicultural society.

Nearly half of Canada's citizens (47%) are of an ethnic origin other than British, French or Native.⁵ This paper's critique of multiculturalism as political symbol and policy should not be regarded as a lament of the political reality of ethnic diversity as a demographic reality in Canada. The symbol and policy serve Canadians poorly. For this reason, the paper concludes with a discussion of what might be termed, with a nod to Alexis de Tocqueville, "multiculturalism properly understood."

MULTICULTURALISM: FROM INTERESTS TO IDENTITY

⁵ Department of Canadian Heritage. Date modified: 2005/03/18.
http://www.pch.gc.ca/multi/plan_action_plan/overview_vue_e.cfm. Retrieved September 27, 2006.

Garth Stevenson claims Pierre Trudeau coined the term, “multiculturalism” in the late 1960s.⁶ In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary indicates the Swiss used it first in 1957 to signify a property of multilingualism. The second instance the OED lists is the 1965 Canadian *Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, which invokes the term to clarify, “mosaic,” a term usually used to signify the ethnic diversity of post-war Canada which had supposedly been hitherto dominated by French and English.⁷

While “mosaic” generally refers to the demographic reality of Canada’s multiethnic society, Stevenson argues its political meaning presupposes the Crown’s tradition of establishing different arrangements, or privileges, with particular subjects and groups of subjects. The Canadian founders in the 1860s differed from Americans because they regarded the Crown the supreme guardian of responsible government and thus of liberty, partly due to their observations that the U. S. Civil War was the result of their republican form of government. Historically, the Crown’s legal enactments included group privileges in constitutional documents, dating back to the 1763 Royal Proclamation that recognized aboriginals, and the Québec Act that extended group rights to French Canadians. As historian W. L. Morton notes, group rights are a device of monarchies, not of republican governments, which are grounded in a social contract that assumes all are equal before the law.⁸ A monarchy does not derive legitimacy from “the people,” so it is not obliged to treat all equally in order to maintain its legitimacy.

⁶ Garth Stevenson, “Multiculturalism: As Canadian as Apple Pie,” *Inroads*, 4 (1995): 74.

⁷ *Preliminary Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, (Ottawa : Queen's Printer, 1965). The phrase “Canadian mosaic” first appeared in the 1920s and in 1938 was popularized as the title of a book written by John Murray Gibbon, then public relations director of Canadian Pacific (Ibid., 77).

⁸ W. L. Morton, *The Canadian Identity*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), 85.

Moreover, the Crown exercises executive discretion, which is seen in its administrative prominence in Canada's constitutional architecture.⁹ Thus, we may view group rights, and multiculturalism, as one of the key historical attempts to distinguish Canadians from Americans. The attempt to maintain these monarchical forms under an ostensibly republican Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) indicates Canadians want to have it both ways: a republic with monarchic trappings.¹⁰ Even so, the Crown has been a source of ethnic strife in Canada because, despite its legal role in guarding responsible government, its symbolic role reminded the French of its Britishness.¹¹

The Founders of Canada were classical liberals and their manner of speaking of diversity in terms of interests and institutions, not identity (as Canadians are more likely to do now), points to a fundamental change in Canada's political culture in the last 140 years: the rise of postmaterialist politics since the 1960s. The Founders' view differs from ours in that they considered the role of government to arbitrate and negotiate different interests, which enable groups to maintain their culture. The Founders' basic sentiment was expressed by French-Canadian H. L. Langevin on February 21, 1865, in the Legislative Assembly of Lower Canada:

We are told: "You wish to form a new nationality." Let us come to an understanding on this word, Mr. Speaker. What we desire and wish is to defend the general interests of a great country and of a powerful nation, by means of a central

⁹ David E. Smith, *The Invisible Crown: The First Principle of Canadian Government*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

¹⁰ Canadian ambivalence toward its "regime" is evidenced in the titles of these works: Frederick Vaughan, *The Canadian Federalist Experiment: Defiant Monarchy to Reluctant Republic* (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003); Janet Ajzenstat, *The Once and Future Canadian Democracy*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2003); David J. Bercuson and Barry Cooper, "From Constitutional Monarchy to Quasi-Republic: The Evolution of Liberal Democracy in Canada," *Canadian Constitutionalism: 1791-1991*, ed., Janet Ajzenstat, (Ottawa: Canadian Study of Parliament Group, 1991). David E. Smith illuminates the obstacles preventing the completion of this transition from monarchy to republic, and casts doubt on its historic inevitability (*The Republican Option in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999)).

¹¹ See Samuel LaSelva, *The Moral Foundations of Federalism: Paradoxes, Achievements, and Tragedies of Federalism*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996), 124.

power. On the other hand, we do not wish to do away with our different customs, manners, and laws; on the contrary those are precisely what we are desirous of protecting in the most complete manner by means of Confederation. Under the new system there will be no more reason than at present to lose our character as French or English, under the pretext that we should all have the same general interests; and our interests in relation to race, religion, and nationality will remain as they are at the present time. But they will be better protected under the proposed system, and that again is one of the strongest reasons in favour of Confederation.¹²

Langevin defines the new Canadian nationality, not in terms of culture, but in terms of allegiance to responsible government, the key to protecting liberty and the customs of the different people in Canada. He displays confidence that responsible government, with its basis in liberalism, enables people to maintain its distinct customs. Like his fellow French-Canadian Wilfred Laurier after him, he thought that while British constitutionalism obtained liberty, non-Englishmen could enjoy its gifts as well.

Pierre Trudeau introduced multiculturalism legislation in 1971, and enshrined it in section 27 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982. Canada received its Multiculturalism Act in 1988. Its origins and purpose are to be found in his battles against Québec nationalists, who saw it as an attempt to dilute their claims. Canada would be composed of many nations, not just two. As such, multiculturalism became identified with the broader question of broader Canadian identity and nationhood. If Canadian nationhood was to mean something beyond separate French-speaking and English-speaking nations, then of what would it consist?

Official multiculturalism was implemented in Canada following the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism whose purpose was to determine the

¹² Janet Ajzenstat, Paul Romney, Ian Gentles and William D. Gairdner, eds., *Canada's Founding Debates*. (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 235.

source of conflict between the French and English aspirations of Canada.¹³ Rather than support biculturalism, the Commission supported the recognition of a multiplicity of ethnic and cultural communities as part of a larger Canadian public.¹⁴ The result of the commission was the evocation of a bilingual, yet multicultural nation. It suited Trudeau who sought to instil a sense of nationalism in Canada that transcended the contention between the French and English. Trudeau's view was one of pan-Canadianism which articulates that "all Canadians, regardless of mother tongue, ethnicity, region of residence or social class, were to have a common sense of what it meant to be Canadian."¹⁵ Multiculturalism policy was also intentionally activist by attempting to produce social equality: "to help all cultural groups develop the capacity to grow and to contribute to Canada, to assist minority groups in overcoming cultural barriers to participate fully in Canadian society, to promote inter-group relations, and to provide facilities to minority groups for language learning."¹⁶ Not long after, Canada passed the world's first Multicultural Act in 1988 that was intended to "ensure the full participation of all cultural and racial communities in shaping the nation's social, cultural, political and economic environment."¹⁷

In introducing multiculturalism, Trudeau argued that:

¹³ Phillip Resnick, *The European Roots of Canadian Identity*. (Ontario, Canada: Broadview Press, 2005), 57.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Patrick James and Michael Lusztig. "Say Goodbye to the Dream of One Canada: The Costly Failure to Purchase National Unity," Hamish Telford and Harvey Lazar, eds., *Canadian Political Cultures in Transition*, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2001), 84.

¹⁶ Ratna Gosh, *Redefining Multicultural Education*, 2nd ed. (Toronto, ON: Nelson Thomson Learning, 2002), 7.

¹⁷ Augie Fleras and Jean Leonard Elliott. *Multiculturalism in Canada: The Challenge of Diversity*, (Toronto, ON: Nelson Canada, 1992), 273; see also Leslie A. Pal, *Interests of State: The Politics of Language, Multiculturalism and Feminism in Canada*. (Montréal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 194.

There is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian. What could be more absurd than the concept of an ‘all-Canadian’ boy or girl? A society which emphasizes uniformity is one which creates intolerance and hate.... What the world should be seeking and what we in Canada must continue to cherish are not concepts of uniformity but human values: compassion, love and understanding. Our standards in all activities should be one of excellence, but our routes to its achievement may be as numerous as there are Canadians who pursue it¹⁸

Trudeau’s speech is characterized by its anti-Americanism and evocations of abstract nationhood. The nonexistence of the “all-Canadian” contrasts with the ubiquity of “all-American,” and Canadian tolerance of “diversity” contrasts with “a society which emphasizes uniformity, ... intolerance and hate.” Discussions of Canadian nationhood and identity are perpetually haunted by the resentment-laden claim that Canadians are simply not-Americans: identity defined as a negative. It is a mark of resentment when one identifies oneself exclusively in terms of opposition to one’s enemy, and at best ends in using “the other” as a scapegoat. Trudeau’s demagogic appeal to anti-Americanism corresponds with his embrace of “diversity” and his refusal to provide a positive definition of Canadian identity: “There is no such thing as a model or ideal Canadian.” This model of identity consists of abstract qualities like compassion, love, and understanding (terms frequently repeated by subsequent government reports on Canadian identity). This abstractness is what socialist Gad Horowitz once referred to as “the masochistic celebration of Canadian nothingness.”¹⁹ Even so, an entity lacking in internal definition will necessarily define itself according to external actors, as if to confirm Schmitt’s friend-enemy distinction as the essence of its politics.

Contemporary concerns over lack of Canadian nationhood or common culture

¹⁸ Quoted in, Reginald Bibby, *Mosaic Madness*, (Don Mills, ON: Stoddart, 1990), 108.

¹⁹ Gad Horowitz, “Mosaics and Identity,” *Making It: The Canadian Dream*, eds., Bryan Finnigan and Cy Gonick, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1972), 473.

betray a transformation of Canadian politics over the course of the twentieth-century, from a politics that emphasized interests to one of identity. Alan Cairns summarizes the current state of Canadian politics:

Perhaps the central characteristic of modern society is diversity, a gallery of discordant voices issuing from fundamentally divergent ways of seeing the world. Modernity, or post-modernity, from this perspective, is inescapably plural and should not be compressed into a single mode or manner of expression, thinking, believing, and feeling. The Canadian citizenship of the future, accordingly, must seek accommodation with this diversity, both of internal nations and of the multiple identities and cleavages within them.²⁰

For Langevin, politics centers on responsible government and the negotiation of interests. Advocates of multiculturalism treat politics more as a matter of recognizing identity than of negotiating interests, which romantics regard as too bourgeois because that language fails to touch on one's inmost self. Janet Ajzenstat observes the romantic does not simply view the lack of community as a loss or a mild form of diminished existence. Rather, without community, "one's sense of self, one's very capacity to live, to love, to soldier on, is threatened."²¹ At the core of the romantic is the terror of loneliness within the modern state, a yawning negativity that must be quenched. This yawning negativity is the psychological counterpart to the post-nationalist nationalism that refuses to say what it is for.

The Founders were classical liberals who thought of politics as an activity of negotiating and deliberating about interests, which exist as objects external to subjects.²²

At a minimum, interests require an element of reflection and calculation with respect to

²⁰ Alan C. Cairns, *Reconfigurations: Canadian Citizenship and Constitutional Change*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, Inc., 1995), 160-161.

²¹ Ajzenstat, *The Once and Future Canadian Democracy: An Essay in Political Thought*, 120.

²² Albert O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests*, Twentieth Anniversary Edition, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 32; Harvey Mansfield, "Self-Interest Rightly Understood," *Political Theory*, 23(1) (February 1995): 61.

the manner in which they are pursued; and they require humans to be somewhat social, as being attentive to one's own interest entails becoming aware of the interests of others. Conversely, identity cannot be deliberated so much as contemplated. If we follow Aristotle who distinguishes the activity of politics from philosophy as a difference between deliberating about means versus the contemplation of ends, the utopianism of multiculturalism appears as the contemplation of individuated ends.²³

Four reasons can be offered for this change from interests to identity in Canadian identity. First, the shift from interests, which are external, to identity, which is internal or intrinsic, betrays a lack of confidence in a regime's ability to negotiate interests. A key strategy liberal democracies use to maintain peace is to take overly contentious issues off the table of public debate. Keeping religion a private matter is the paradigmatic example of this strategy. But more mundane interests can also be taken off the table if those interests cannot be negotiated, as seemed to be the case with Québec. Trudeau's strategy of absorbing Québec nationalism into the broader parameters of multiculturalism was bought at the cost of identifying something much less tangible and much more private and individuated than interests, which naturally led to increased anxiety over the nature of the civic bond holding the country together.

The shift from interest to identity can also be seen as reflective of the rise of so-called postmaterialist politics. According to this theory, societies that become prosperous turn their attention from the distribution of scarce resources to less material political issues including rights of minorities, identity, the environment, and so forth. Trudeau is the poster-child of postmaterialist politics in Canada as it arose in the nineteen-sixties. This new type of politics can also be seen in the rise of political romanticism since the

²³ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1112a20-25.

1960s.²⁴

The third cause for this shift can be seen in the general equation of politics and culture, along with the accompanying romantic assumption that culture drives politics. Trudeau equated political equality with social equality, thereby conflating politics and culture, which the Founders kept separate. While social equality generally refers to wealth, its concerns get easily broadened to various social conditions of those groups deemed unequal.²⁵

The final reason for the shift from interest to identity is the nation-founding purpose of multiculturalism. While multiculturalism has not always received full ministerial status in the federal cabinet, and section 27 of the Charter is rarely used explicitly by the Supreme Court, multiculturalism represents an aspiration or ideology meant to supplant the “customs, manners, and laws” Langevin considered foundational for the Founding. For instance, despite its ostensibly minor role in the document, s. 27 reads as a preamble to the Charter by providing a guide for interpretation: “This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians.” As providing a new “symbolic order,” this functional “preamble” may be in tension with the actual Preamble to the Charter, which reads: “Whereas Canada is founded upon principles that recognize the supremacy of God and the rule of law.” Whereas courts generally ignore the actual Preamble (the British Columbia Court of Appeal went so far as to call it a “dead-letter”²⁶), the goals of s. 27 are

²⁴ In general, see Neil Nevitte, *The Decline of Deference*, (Toronto: Broadview Press, 1996); Ajzenstat, *The Once and Future Canadian Democracy*.

²⁵ Rainer Knopff, *Human Rights and Social Technology: The New War on Discrimination*. (Ottawa: Carleton University Press, 1990), 17.

²⁶ *R. v. Sharpe*, (1999) B. C. J. No. 1555 at 78-80, per Justice Southin. (British Columbia Court of Appeal); see also David M. Brown, “Freedom From Or Freedom For?: Religion as a Case Study in Defining the Content of Charter Rights,” *University of British Columbia Law Review*, 33 (Special Edition) 2000: 560-63.

forwarded most prominently through the extensive jurisprudence of section 15, which covers group rights.²⁷ In this sense, multiculturalism provides a political aspiration of nation-building that guides the Charter. It is meant to constitute a new postmodern cosmopolitan spirit of the laws that negates the reference to the Enlightenment and pre-Enlightenment traditions implicit in the actual Preamble.²⁸

Yet, it is unclear that multiculturalism is able to serve as an ideology for building a particular nation. By providing a moral argument for recognizing hitherto marginalized groups, it focuses on particular subnational entities; by managing their relations through tolerance and a liberal ethic of leaving others alone on the condition they reciprocate, multiculturalism fails to provide guidance on the sorts of positive obligations citizens owe one another. Indeed, it is unclear multiculturalism can sustain a sense of citizenship except either for an empire based on the millet system, or a cosmopolitan universal state where national boundaries are erased because the obligations of world-citizens are equal toward friend and stranger alike, meaning they have obligations to none. Multiculturalism simultaneously and somewhat paradoxically encourages what might be called tribal passions (or culturalists) as well as cosmopolitan and humanitarian ones (multiculturalists). It focuses on the particular and on the universal, omitting the intermediate, which is the political realm where people come together to negotiate their interests. As a result, Allan Cairns observed in the 1990s when multiculturalism was at the center of political debate: “Canadians are in the grip of competing nationalisms

²⁷ Gerald L. Gall, “Jurisprudence Under Section 27 of the *Charter*: The Second Decade,” *Windsor Yearbook of Access to Justice* (2002): 307-330.

²⁸ See Raymond Breton, “Multiculturalism and Canadian Nation-Building,” *The Politics of Gender, Ethnicity, and Language in Canada*, eds., Alan Cairns and Cynthia Williams, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), 27-66. On the meaning of the Preamble in light of the related question of Canada’s secularization, see Douglas Farrow, “Of Secularity and Civil Religion,” in *Recognizing Religion in a Secular Society: Essays in Pluralism, Religion, and Public Policy*, ed., Douglas Farrow, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 2004), 140-82.

driven by pride, resentment, humiliation, and anger.”²⁹

ATTEMPTING TO ROMANTICIZE AND TO REDEEM THE PAST

Pride normally conflicts with resentment and humiliation. Part of the reason for these contradictory passions is the conflicting attitude toward the past that multiculturalism promotes. It teaches that the past is corrupt insofar as it is full of “historic injustices” committed by colonial powers. The past of individual groups, however, is golden because that was the time before it was tainted by those very colonial powers. Multiculturalism then tries to “redeem” that past by promising a golden cosmopolitan future. However, that future is as, if not more, hostile toward those particular cultures than the allegedly colonial powers. This section explicates the complicated attitude toward the past, and the next section considers its vision of the future.

Neil Bissoondath complains that immigrants receive mixed signals when they come to Canada. They are welcomed and then they are told that they get to keep all their cultural trappings, as if they never had to leave Mumbai or Trinidad. On the one hand, this “diversity” never really goes beyond treating immigrants as exotic decorations, entertainment as relief for bourgeois ennui:

Implicit in [the multicultural] approach is the peculiar notion of culture as commodity; a thing that can be displayed, performed, admired, bought, sold or forgotten. It represents a devaluation of culture, its reduction to bauble and kitsch. A traditional dance performed on stage is not a people’s cultural life but an aspect of it removed from context, shaped and packaged to give a voyeuristic pleasure. It

²⁹ Alan C. Cairns, *Reconfigurations: Canadian Citizenship and Constitutional Change*, 316.

is not without value, but value on par with the reproduced treasures of Tutankhamen sold in every sad store on the continent.³⁰

On the other hand, it leaves immigrants bewildered as to where they've arrived. Presumably, there is a reason why they wanted to leave Mumbai or Trinidad, and they go to Canada as a place of liberty and opportunity. Canada seems to tell them that their past was richer, more authentic, than their future in liberal democratic Canada will be, and this undermines their allegiance to their new post-national nation. Thus, echoing Rousseau's complaint that Christianity divides political allegiance just as it divides the soul against itself, Bissoondath elsewhere observes: "Multiculturalism, with its emphasis on the importance of holding on to the former homeland, with its insistence that *There* is more important than *Here*, serves to encourage this attitude."³¹

Bissoondath argues that multiculturalism produces a false sense of nostalgia for a utopian past among immigrants as well as Canadians in general, because it treats the present culture as a barren wasteland that needs to be enchanted, not only by exotic ancient rituals of individual cultures, but from the spectacle of having them all mix together: "All of this [multiple cultural identities] runs to the traditional notion of returning to the collective source, to the touchstone of heritage, which is also an altar to the self – a place where the air is always pure, the water sparkling, the colors ever vibrant, the world good."³² Yet, Bissoondath observes that the memory of a

...retreating past ever more golden frequently leads to acute personal dissatisfaction. It is easy, in the comforting grip of edited memory, to forget that

³⁰ Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, 83.

³¹ Bissoondath, "A Question of Belonging," in *Belonging: The Meaning and Future of Canadian Citizenship*, ed., William Kaplan, (Montréal-Kingston: McGill-Queens University Press, 1993), 382. Emphasis in original.

³² Bissoondath, *Selling Illusions*, 237.

everything has changed; easy too, to embrace the miscalculation that arises from an acute yearning for perfection that, in memory, used to be. Multiculturalism, with its stress on the theatrical, helps concretize such fantasy, and once more both the individual and the state lose – the one by clinging to and at times acting on fantasy, the other by paling before golden fantasy taken for reality.³³

Bissoondath's reflections on the false sense of nostalgia as well as cultural Puritanism for a utopian past that multiculturalism produces shows us that it gains its currency in the general population by appealing to a sense of spiritual disenchantment. We frequently hear about how shallow modern life is. Americanization, McWorld, globalization, capitalism, liberalism, and individualism, are all symbols that we use to describe the world as a cold and calculating place that is hostile to more authentic forms of thriving and of community. Ajzenstat pinpoints multiculturalism's romanticism: "We're deficient because we don't value nationhood and don't encourage our national culture and because our cultural minorities can't fully express the characteristics of their particular heritages....The contention is that cultural identity is valuable in and of itself, regardless of its content, so to speak."³⁴ By viewing the world this way, Canadians show that they are romantic at heart, even though in their minds they are classical liberal and capitalist.

However, Bissoondath's critique of enchanting nostalgia does not quite capture what is going on, for nostalgia looks to the past, but multiculturalism looks to the future. The large sums of money spent on multicultural programs (\$1.5 billion annually in the mid-1990s), many of which are meant to combat racism and intolerance, indicates that it is intended to create a society free of prejudice. The present is corrupt, and it needs the nostalgia of the past to warm the perfection of the future. But how does this work?

³³ Ibid., 232.

³⁴ Ajzenstat, *The Once and Future Canadian Democracy*, 119.

It depends on which past one is talking about. The golden past Bissoondeth mentions is meant to put the bourgeois political order into bad light, but in itself does not offer a serious alternative. The “serious” alternative is the strategy multiculturalism serves, which is the attempt by the managerial state to fashion a post-nationalist nationalism. This topic will be discussed in the next part of this essay.

Trudeau regarded multiculturalism as an attempt to instill confidence among citizens: “National unity if it is to mean anything in the deeply personal sense, must be founded on confidence in one’s own individual identity.... A vigorous policy of multiculturalism will help create this initial confidence. It can form the base of a society which is based on fair play for all.”³⁵ However, the strategy is misplaced if it is meant to provide “initial” confidence because, by its very logic, said confidence, or “recognition,” can never be granted. The state cannot provide personal confidence. Defenders of the “managerial state” think it can, though defenders of the liberal state doubt it.³⁶ The process this “recognition” gets extended is in the game of “correcting historic injustices.” While the Canadian state has committed numerous injustices to minorities, the idea of correcting “historic injustices” is incoherent. The symbol “historic” blurs the concrete particular identities of those who have suffered injustice. Stevenson observes that, “in the nature of collective rights, no injury to actual living persons need be claimed, much less proved.”³⁷ In addition to the indefiniteness of the sufferer’s identity, the identity of the perpetrator of injustice is obscured because, not only are the perpetrators of historic

³⁵ Quoted in Kenneth McRoberts, *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National Unity*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 126.

³⁶ Harvey Mansfield, Jr., *America’s Constitutional Soul*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 73-100. The importance of pride, *pace* classical liberalism, means that self-interest is an insufficient basis for politics.

³⁷ Garth Stevenson, “Multiculturalism: As Canadian as Apple Pie,” 83.

injustice long gone, but a democratic society like Canada eschews lines of historical meaning that get handed down from generation to generation. “Historic injustice,” like the cliché of “unmastered past” often cited during the German post-war period, assumes that the past is something that can be mastered.³⁸ But this requires a view of history that regards history as a unit of meaning of which one can become fully conscious, and this precisely the romanticism that multiculturalism expresses. Because the cliché “historic injustices” is based on an incoherent view of historical meaning, the attempt to correct them can only be a game of grievances.³⁹

The game of grievances, then, is played between a single group identified as the oppressor, and numerous victims. This means there is nothing “multi” about multiculturalism. It is more a matter of “us” and “them,” where “them” gets categorized into ethnic – rather, racial – categories foreign to them. James Ceaser observes that multiculturalism is multi- and cultural in name only. In reality, the symbol (he calls it an ideology) is binary based on the distinction between Oppressor and Oppressed, or “Hegemon” and “Other.”: “Those with the ‘hegemonic power’ possess above all the power to bestow or to fail to bestow recognition. The failure to recognize another culture ‘can inflict a grievous wound, saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred.’ The victim – misrecognized and marginalized – is the ‘Other,’ the ‘voice’ that is submerged.”⁴⁰ Ceaser identifies the two chief passions multiculturalism fosters to be

³⁸ Eric Voegelin, *Hitler and the Germans*, trans., Detlev Clemens and Brendan Purcell, (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), 70-75.

³⁹ For details on this process, see Thomas Sowell, *The Quest for Cosmic Justice*, (New York: Free Press, 1999); Paul Gottfried, *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Guilt: Towards a Secular Theocracy*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2004), 66.

⁴⁰ James Ceaser, “Multiculturalism and American Democracy,” in *Multiculturalism and American Democracy*, eds., Arthur M. Melzer, Jerry Weinberger, and M. Richard Zinman, (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1998), 142, quoting Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism and “The Politics of Recognition”*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 25-6.

“supine contrition (on the part of the Hegemon) and aggressive resentment (on the part of the Other).”

The Hegemon is the white heterosexual male and the American; the Other is necessarily everyone else, whether or not they view themselves as similar, meaning Pakistani Punjabis are grouped with Indian Punjabis, and both groups are supposed to be as Asian as a Pentecostal from South Korean. This grouping together altogether ignores cultural differences and ends up treating them as a single race, which confirms another of Ceaser’s observations:

Although classical racialism has been rejected—and although the dominant voices of the hard sciences have sought to eliminate racial considerations completely—racialist thinking has reemerged at the vanguard of modern intellectual discourse under the aegis of the school known as multiculturalism or the politics of difference. At the same time that this school has been an inveterate foe of classical racialist ideology, it has made racial categories the common currency of contemporary thought. While this school claims in one breath that the source of difference in society is cultural, in the next it closely links these cultures to biological, and especially racial, groups. Its image of America as a society controlled by Euro-centric Anglo-Saxon hegemony reestablishes race as the central theme of America’s historical experience and follows the descriptive account—even as it rejects the evaluation—of the old positivist image of America as sketched by the classical racialists.⁴¹

Yet, multiculturalism can only be regarded as relying on racial categories by default instead of design. The dance of supine contrition and aggressive resentment is not simply as a spectacle of conjuring up the past. In Voegelin’s language, the demand for “recognition” constitutes an attempt to “master the past.”

However, recognition of inmost identity is neither possible nor desirable. This can be seen if we consider the case of friendship, which is more intimate than political ties, but seems to be the goal of political romanticism. Defending Aristotle’s notion of

⁴¹ Ceaser, *Reconstructing America: the Symbol of America in Modern Thought*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 107.

friendship as partnership over the romantic ideal of friendship as intimacy, David O'Connor observes that friendship as partnership appears less altruistic and, indeed, less "friendly," than an altruism that seeks intimate insight into a friend's otherness, dignity, or inner-being.⁴² Yet, intimacy seeks too much from friendship and is consequently a recipe for manipulation. Friends, not to mention political subjects, cannot gain sufficient cognitive penetration of their friends to know them as well as they know themselves. Our knowledge of even our closest friends is through a looking-glass darkly; expecting more is a recipe for disappointment and resentment. Intimacy of this kind is also recipe for manipulation because it fails simply to accept one's friend as he is, to accept his individuality. This is why Augustine, when famously lamenting the death of his unnamed friend in *Confessions* IV, confesses that in loving him too much he regarded him simply as an image of himself. The inmost identity of the friend ends up being one's own self-projection. If this is true of even the closest friends, then only a political romantic would demand such intimacy of fellow citizens.

MULTICULTURALISM AND THE VISION OF THE COSMOPOLITAN FUTURE

Bissoondath describes the reaction of former Minister of State for Multiculturalism, Sheila Finestone, to his book. She trotted out the usual criticisms: Bissoondath must be a backwoods racist, or a member of the Reform Party, which, for her, is the same thing. She told a CTV reporter that "There isn't any one Canadian identity. Canada has no national culture." Bissoondath remarks that Finestone had

⁴² David O'Connor, "Two Ideals of Friendship," *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 7(2) (April 1990): 118-19.

unwittingly unveiled multiculturalism's "unstated mantra," which holds that Canada lacks an overarching culture or identity. Rather, like a mosaic or a multi-colored coat (to use Plato's image of democracy), its definition resides in the fact that it lacks definition.

In recent years, the image of "conversation" has come to the fore as an edifying metaphor used to describe Canada's post-nationalist nationalism. Ajzenstat claims "conversation" has taken over as the central term because "in some scholarly circles the idea that one talks about a country is hopelessly old-fashioned."⁴³ Definitions are often deemed the product of patriarchal, linear Enlightenment thinking. Even so, "conversation" seems to be a convenient way to describe the hope for Canada to be a post-nationalist nation, an identity without having an identity. A conversation is conducted among equals. It is civilized in tone and presupposes a degree of civility, if not friendship, among its participants. Furthermore, a conversation is indeterminate insofar as one never knows where it will lead. Let it meander and take on a life of its own, because placing limits on a conversation is the best way to kill it and to exclude participants who have important things to say.

However, the metaphor is inadequate because, to remain a civil conversation, it must necessarily exclude unacceptable viewpoints and, in extreme cases, protect people from those unacceptable viewpoints. Diversity might be good, but certainly not for its own sake.

The second difficulty goes deeper, and ultimately reveals why multiculturalism is a cosmopolitan antipolitical and monistic ideal that requires an activist state and elites to enforce it. In evoking conversation as the model for conducting multiculturalism and diversity, James Tully uses the image of Haida sculptor Bill Reid's "The Spirit of Haida

⁴³ Ajzenstat, *Once and Future Democracy*, 123.

Gwaii,” which, appropriately, sits in the Canadian embassy in Washington.⁴⁴ This sculpture encapsulates his cosmopolitan vision of multiculturalism; insofar as the government uses it as one of Canada’s key symbols, it seems also to reflect the regime’s vision of multicultural nationhood.

The sculpture contains a variety of human, half-human, and non-human characters in a canoe, which jostle about and carry on a lively conversation. They include a bear, a frog, and a raven, the latter being the trickster who reinvents himself in countless Haida myths, like Proteus in ancient Greek myth who could never be caught because once caught, he would change into some other form and slip away like quicksilver. The canoe represents the ship of state that floats precariously toward an unknown destination, and the motley crew of mythical figures represents the diverse “voices” that constitute society. So diverse are these voices that they cannot even understand each other. Tully observes that that is how we experience other cultures – their unfamiliarity forces us out of our comfort zones, and understanding them recedes, just as the raven or Proteus slips out of our hands. However, there is a bit of a problem here. As Augustine once observed, two people who cannot understand each other’s languages have less in common with each other than a person with his dog. Such is the legacy of the tower of Babel. But Tully is undaunted by Babel. Rather, he points to the towering figure of the sculpture, Kilstlaai, the soothsayer or shaman who guides the ship of state and translates the disparate voices to one another. He compares Kilstlaai the soothsayer to Tiresias. As chief, he has authority to care for the common good. His is a universal perspective that transcends the diversity of voices in the canoe.

⁴⁴ As explained on the Canadian Embassy’s website (<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/can-am/washington/services/haida-en.asp>). It is also on the back of the Canadian twenty-dollar bank note.

Tully does not explain how the soothsayer-chief would find a home in a constitutional democracy, but it is clearly an enlightened and authoritarian figure, something more awesome and awful than a mandarin of the managerial state.

Tully's description of his mystical encounter with the sculpture betrays his political romanticism: "The Spirit of Haida Gwaii evokes a sense of wonder. It is mystical. I want to walk in silence around its overflowing spirits, letting their endless perspectives and interrelations awaken the play of my imagination from its dogmatic slumber. I know its meaning is unfathomable and my words are unworthy."⁴⁵ One can sympathize with the sense of wonder he has in viewing the masterpiece. Moreover, Tully provides us with an illuminating look into the meaning of "diversity" than its less reflective exponents, who simply assert the term without explaining its meaning. This enjoyment in flux is at the core of Tully's constitutional prescriptions, which are predicated on his view that liberal constitutionalism is bound up too closely with English ethnicity and so incapable of handling different cultures. The shifting forms in the sculpture are meant to represent the shifting forms of constitutional principles and practices that multiculturalism would provide. Tully's rapturous delight in the Haida Gwaii is perfectly captured by Isaiah Berlin's description of the political romantic: "the essence of the romantic movement, so far as I can see [is] will and man as an activity, as something which cannot be described because it is perpetually creating; you must not even say that it is creating itself, for there is no self, there is only movement. That is the heart of romanticism."⁴⁶ Tully's mystical vision also resembles what Eric Voegelin called, "metastatic faith," which is the revolutionary's mystical desire to transform the

⁴⁵ James Tully, *Strange Multiplicity: Constitutionalism in an Age Of Diversity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 22.

⁴⁶ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, quoted in Ajzenstat, *The Once and Future Democracy*, 131.

world. What kind of world is it? It is one where diversity is taken for its own sake, where forms change from one to the next, as the raven in the sculpture creates multiple identities. Art critics call the notion of shifting forms, “reflective disequilibrium,” which can be found in postmodern contemporary art as well as in premodern art, as illustrated in Bill Reid’s sculpture.

However, as a metastatic faith for a transformed world – the one of multiculturalism – “reflective disequilibrium” ultimately points to the nightmare world of the mass-man, the one whose lack of self calls upon the managerial state to provide “confidence.” For it is the mass-man who is kept in disequilibrium, as Machiavelli once counseled princes to keep the many distracted and in perpetual motion to maintain his rule over them. There is little difference between the spiritually empty mass-man and the polymorphous raven.

Many ideologues of multiculturalism would deny the charge of Machiavellianism because they affirm the principle of equality. Yet, Tully does not when he takes the place of the soothsayer-chief. Trudeau too is said to be heavily influenced by Machiavelli. Similarly, Ceaser observes that multiculturalism is inherently antidemocratic because it simultaneously encourages people to think of themselves as part of a culture (the more exotic and marginalized, the better), while negating that culture the moment the more unsavory parts of that culture express themselves:

Multiculturalism is a curious movement. If ever it becomes a mass movement, the multiculturalists (who preach the value of multiplicity or difference) are almost certain to be outnumbered by the culturalists (who are devoted to the beliefs of their own particular culture). The culturalists, moreover, invariably appear as more ‘authentic’ than the multiculturalists, because the culturalists espouse their beliefs in full simplicity without the need of going through an elaborate exercise of intellectual consciousness raising. The culturalists, moreover, are ‘the people of color,’ as witness, for example, the Nation of Islam. Finally, the culturalists are

likely to be more resolute. The multiculturalists are thus in danger of becoming the dupes of the culturalists. Many who march under the banner of multiculturalism do not believe in the ‘multi’ at all, but merely recognize the tactical benefits to be had from joining a temporary coalition against the ‘Eurocentric’ power structure.⁴⁷

Canada has shown it can be duped. As the United States State Department noticed, Canada’s “open borders” immigration policy hinders efforts to weed out those belonging to or having sympathies with terrorist organizations. Moreover, it has gone overboard when it has restrained the claims of culturalists. For instance, the so-called “Boyd Report” recommended the Ontario government allow Muslim groups to use Shari’ah law in arbitration cases, and recommended numerous (possibly suffocating) safeguards to protect the rights of Muslim women.⁴⁸ Jewish and some Christian groups had used similar arbitration procedures since the early 1990s. However, the Ontario government not only rejected the “Boyd Report’s recommendations for Muslims, but also eliminated the arbitration procedures for Jews and Christians, as if implying their internal minorities are as vulnerable as those found among the Muslim population. With the recent legalization of same-sex marriage, both proponents and opponents have noticed the next logical step is polygamy, a multicultural practice if there ever was one, and one that, at least in Ontario, could be imported from a foreign country because Ontario family law recognizes polygamous marriages from foreign jurisdictions.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Ceaser, “Multiculturalism and American Liberal Democracy,” 148-9.

⁴⁸ Marion Boyd, *Dispute Resolution in Family Law: Protecting Choice, Promoting Inclusion*, Report to the Ontario Attorney-General and Minister Responsible for Women’s Issues, 2004.

⁴⁹ On same-sex marriage and polygamy moving marriage “beyond conjugality,” see Martha Bailey, “Regulation of Cohabitation and Marriage in Canada,” *Law and Policy*, 26(1) January 2004: 153-75; Angela Campbell et al, *Polygamy in Canada: Political and Legal Implications for Women and Children*, (Ottawa: Status of Women Canada, 2005). Ontario Family Law Act, R.S.O. 1990, c. F.3, s. 1 (2). (<http://www.canlii.org/on/laws/sta/f-3/20041104/whole.html>). Retrieved September 27, 2006.

CONCLUSION: A SKETCH TOWARD MULTICULTURALISM PROPERLY UNDERSTOOD

As a species of romanticism, multiculturalism posits a utopian vision for Canada that, in theory and practice, is inherently hostile to the nation-state and to the principles of liberal democracy. Even so, the grain of truth it contains is in the way it displays the pathologies of the modern world and its inarticulate attempt to address those.

Multiculturalism, while apolitical as all romanticisms are, expresses disenchantment with liberalism's focus on interests. Throughout this paper we have contrasted liberalism's supposedly political language of interests with multiculturalism's supposedly apolitical identity. However, this contrast is not as simple as we have suggested. For instance, it is by no means clear that interests alone can maintain the unity of a state. Even many liberal philosophers who pondered interests understood this. Romanticism is a long-standing counter-tradition to liberalism's emphasis on interests in the name of something higher, nobler, and something to quench the inner loneliness and negativity of modern man. I would assert that romantics are in search of a form of friendship, but they are looking in the wrong places. They may be in search of some form of political friendship as Aristotle described it, or their language of an inmost identity might betray a desire for something deeper than even that. From an Aristotelian perspective, neither liberalism's interests nor multiculturalism's identity are adequately political for the simple reason that neither can be shared in the form of a story or song. Aristotle observes of political friendship: "And elsewhere Odysseus says that this is the

best pastime, when human beings are enjoying good cheer and ‘the banqueters seated in order throughout the hall listen to a singer.’”⁵⁰

For Aristotle, the civic banquet expresses the fundamental political activity, or literally, “being-at-work” (*energeia*). Multiculturalism has feasts, songs, dance, and the other pieces of a banquet, but only in fragmentary form, and these fragments are simply displayed to other spectators. Multiculturalism is schizophrenic because it seeks the inmost identity but offers only the superficial. Aristotle’s civic banquet unites inner and outer because it conceives of politics as activity, and not about either romanticism’s concern for inmost identity or liberalism’s concern for static interests (utterly external to the individual). It is beyond the scope of this essay to consider how a civic banquet could express this psychological unity under modern conditions of freedom and fragmentation and that also takes into account the Christian differentiation of consciousness separating the polity from the life of the spirit. However, one may suggest that Canada does possess a festival in one of its regions that fulfils these conditions. This festival is the Calgary Stampede, whose bacchanalia Bavarians would recognize as comparable to their own Oktoberfest. However, the central event of the Calgary Stampede is its rodeo, the game that accompanies the banquet. If myth presupposes play, then, for Western Canadians, rodeo reconciles liberal democratic principles of liberty and equality under a myth of judgment that Voegelin might regard as an example of mastering the present.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1338a28-30, quoting *Odyssey*, 9.5-6

⁵¹ John von Heyking, “The Zen of Stampede,” *Calgary Herald*. July 1, 2000, Canada Day Edition. OS8. On the general point of the possibility of politics with the Christian differentiation of consciousness, see my *Augustine and Politics as Longing in the World*, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2001) and “Disarming, Simple, and Sweet: Augustine’s Republican Rhetoric,” in *Talking Democracy: Historical Perspectives on Rhetoric and Democratic Deliberation*, eds., Benedetto Fontana, Cary J. Nederman, and Gary Remer, (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2004), 163-86.

The second point is that there is no such thing as “diversity.” It describes the condition of something, and not the thing itself. When Tully speaks of the ineffability of “endless perspectives and interrelations,” he sounds more like an ancient Neo-Platonic mystic proclaiming the ineffability of the “One” than a liberal democrat. Yet, as Plato showed, “the One” cannot be found in politics, and “diversity” for its own sake is a characteristic of a technological society, and thus of tyranny. Instead of “diversity,” perhaps we should speak of others as being similar and different on the assumption that our souls cannot obtain a pure vision of either the One or the Many.

Finally, living the good life requires rethinking the moral basis of our ideologies and of the modern state. Culture, multi- or not-multi, is the realm of the cave that Plato mentions in the *Republic*. Sculptures, ethnic food, cultural artifacts, and traditions in general are the shadows of half-truths that get shown on the cave wall. As teachers, we need to practice the witchcraft of what Plato called the turning around of the soul. In this regard, we can learn from Voegelin’s encounter with historian Arnold Toynbee, the great historian of civilizations. Toynbee considered civilizations, not nations, the intelligible unit of historical study because national histories cannot be understood in isolation of their civilizational context. For instance, he thought the history of England could not be written in isolation of the history of the Danes or the French. This is also why it is inaccurate to juxtapose Islam versus the West, because Muslims and Westerners have historically been part of the same civilizational matrix for centuries. But Toynbee did not stop with civilizations. Halfway through writing his monumental *A Study of History*, around the end of volume six, he discovered that civilizations are also too narrow. Instead he examined the great religions that gave birth to civilizations. Pondering

Toynbee's quest for truth, or *zetema*, Voegelin found that after twelve volumes Toynbee had not gone far enough. World religions are created by theophanic events that occur in the souls of representative mystics and philosophers. The proper study of history is then the study of these theophanic events and determining the extent to which they represent equivalences of experience. From the Neolithic to the neo-Gnostic, and Plato, Augustine, and Alfarabi in between them, it is up to scholars to study the wealth of empirical materials that modern scientific techniques uncover. Voegelin did acknowledge that our historical moment has a unique characteristic, but not the one of historical self-consciousness dreamed about by romantic multiculturalists. Rather, Voegelin became conscious of the nature of the question itself, as something prompted by that which seeks to be known.⁵²

It is obvious this work is more serious than the multicultural kitsch and academic dilettantism that currently passes for multiculturalism. Now, as it was twenty-five centuries ago, cultivating souls entails the mysteries of turning them around. Turning away from the wall toward philosophy provides the true authentic life that the state can never provide, because such a life is with friends. With the help of political philosophy and friends, we can treat culture with the lack of seriousness it deserves.

⁵² Voegelin, "Equivalences of Experience and Symbolization in History," in *Published Essays, 1966-1985, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 12, ed., Ellis Sandoz, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1990), 115-33; "Toynbee's *History* as a Search for Truth," in *Published Essays, 1953-1965, Collected Works of Eric Voegelin*, vol. 11, ed., Ellis Sandoz, (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 100-112.